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## George H. Proffit His Day and Generation

By GEORGE R. WILSON, Jasper

Dedicated to my sister, Miss Margaret A. Wilson

Information and incidents of thrilling interest may be found in the lives of many of our leading pioneers in southern Indiana. They erected our state, wrote our constitutions and started Indiana on a long and honorable career. The wisdom of some was sought in the councils of the nation, to its own credit and benefit; the voices of others were heard in congress, at public debates, and in our high courts with consideration, pleasure, and public benefit; the bravery of many was shown in our early wars and in the local but nationally historic battlefield of Tippecanoe, while the executive ability and war record of General Harrison called him to the White House.

One of the bright stars in a constellation we might call the "Southern Cross" of Indiana is George H. Proffit, of Pike county. My own county of Dubois is interested in Mr. Proffit because he represented the county in the legislature during the years 1831, 1832, 1836, 1837, and 1838 (five terms); and in congress, from 1839 to 1843, (two terms), twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh congresses; and because he was one of our pioneer merchants, even though his store at Portersville, our first county-town, may have been only a branch store of that at Petersburg. In this way we became, in a sense, personally interested in this brilliant pioneer orator, political meteor, and youthful statesman; this French lily of Louisiana, transplanted to Hoosier soil, led an eventful career for about

twenty years, living entirely, while in Indiana, under the state's first constitution.

The production of a biographical sketch places a responsibility upon a writer that is almost personal. For that reason we called into our services the intimate knowledge of Mr. W. D. Crow, editor of the *Petersburg Press*; Mr. Simon Morgan, grandson, and Mr. Geo. C. Morgan, great-grandson of Mr. Proffit; Mrs. Mary J. Taylor, and others to whom history and tradition had been handed down. It has been said that so many distinguished men have risen from apparently adverse circumstances on farms, or on the frontier in America, that it has become a common lot of biography to magnify the difficulties of such an origin and praise the man who has overcome such impediments. We can hardly say this of our subject, for he was born September 7, 1807, in New Orleans; and, died in Louisville, September 7, 1847, at the age of forty, but we can give him credit for making use of his opportunities and abilities, which is indeed worth while. It was Mr. Proffit's good fortune to be in touch with the best thought and temper of the state in his day. In this connection it is well to remember that eighty years ago the south and west were closely related from a political standpoint. In point of time, trade and travel, New Orleans was our metropolis.

The New England people pride themselves on their learning and general literary qualities, and justly so; yet we must remember that from south of the Ohio river—the cavalier half of America; the Jamestown section, if you please—came many flowery orators, statesmen and writers, even from as far south as the Gulf of Mexico. Patrick Henry, the orator of liberty days; Jefferson, writer of the Declaration of Independence, our title deed to liberty; Washington, the father of his country; Marshall, the construer and great conservator of the constitution, were Virginians, and therefore southern people. It is largely due to Virginians that the earlier public discussions and the later public papers so often partook of the quality of literature. Our own subject was a capable artist when it came to delivering an oratorical address in poetic prose.

We do not wish to record mere platitudes of excellence, without giving a reason, or the circumstances under which, or

through which, Mr. Proffit's dominant qualities were brought out; therefore a short review of pioneer days is carried through this biography. From the close of the American Revolution until the close of the Civil war public speakers in America were rather extravagant in their statements. Their orations were frequently of the bombastic order, which in our vernacular is appropriately named "tall talk." Even the most prominent and world renowned orators used the grandiloquent style of oratory, in courts as well as before the public. This tendency to extravagant oratory may be seen in the early orations of such men as Patrick Henry; the scholarly Webster; the famous Virginian, known as Henry Clay of Kentucky; Missouri's Senator Benton; South Carolina's famous Senator Hayne, the great southern leader; John C. Calhoun; and many others of Mr. Proffit's day. Such oratory usually follows successful revolutions, and frequently leads up to other revolutions. It is a matter of fact that the Indiana pioneers loved a spread-eagle speech. Eloquence of that kind reached a degree of extravagance, bombast, and turgidity, never before known, except perhaps, in the ritualistic formalities of the feudal ages. It was what the voter wanted and he got it, as he usually does, even unto this day. Such a flow and style of language may have had much to do in placing Indiana before the country in literature as well as in politics. It is also found in the advertisements for the opening of new pioneer towns, about 1830.

Mr. Proffit was a shrewd politician and knew how to handle the gift nature had given him, with the skill and art of the most successful orators of his day. His style of delivery enhanced his words with deeper meaning and more power than when ordinarily used. He knew how to apply the exciting adjectives to the sleeping nouns, with the skill of a master. Mr. Proffit was a good off-hand speaker, a success in an undress uniform as well as in the regulation dress suit of his day. He was a brilliant and witty local epigrammatist and phrasemaker, whose ideas attracted any one who had the good fortune to know him intimately. He looked what he was. His features were full of intellectual strength and becoming graces. His glance was a mingling of the sunshine and the lightning of heaven.

Mr. Proffit came upon this earth during the first decade of the last century, when such wonderful literary men as Cowper, Macauley, Lytton, Hugo, Emerson, Schiller, Andersen, Browning, Mill, Longfellow, Whittier, Poe, Holmes, Tennyson, Darwin, Fitzgerald, Lincoln, and many others were ushered in. Wonderful men were being born! Few decades of the century can outclass the first decade. It was a time when great intellectual men were coming. Could it have been in the air, or in the heir?

From 1830 to 1850, nearly all orators saw fit to have a high sounding beginning, an argumentative discourse, and a lofty and grandiloquent peroration, in which their figures of speech soar broad-cast to the high heavens. Occasionally arguments were replaced by things sentimental. There was a lofty and bombastic style not often seen in these days. The faded portraits of pioneer days usually show an orator in a full dress suit, or a swallow-tailed coat, with one hand stuck in front between the buttons in imitation of Daniel Webster, waiting for the applause to die down.

The decades from 1830 to 1850 were marked with mawkish sentimentality; it was an era of extreme sentiment and gush, perhaps better described as "swash"; no one seems to know just why. This is evident in the songs, pictures, etc., of those days. Mr. Proffit lived in an age when people were much given to hero worship and to extreme and sweeping statements. This is evident from his addresses and from those of all other orators of his day. There was much floridness and exaggeration in the political speeches of the middle period of the last century. The *Congressional Globe* is indisputable evidence.

To have been born in a log cabin was a source of popularity at the time of the Harrison election, in 1840, and it was magnified greatly for political effect. In pioneer days the minds of men were busily engaged, perhaps more than at the present time, in studying our government, compiling and applying new laws, promoting new enterprises, institutions, or policies, or in finding objections to them. Most men were intensely partisan, and were usually known as followers of the thoughts promulgated by their respective favorite politician or statesman, for whom they would fight at the drop of a hat.

Mr. Proffit served five terms in the state legislature. In 1831 and also, in 1832, he served on the committee on education; in 1836 he served on the judiciary committee, on enrolled bills and on canals and internal improvements; in 1837, he served on the judiciary, on corporations, and on canal and internal improvements, and in 1838, on the judiciary, canal and internal improvements. In 1837, Mr. Proffit received the second highest vote for speaker of the house.

In Governor Noah Noble's message to the legislature, December, 1836, appear these words:

In establishing the several routes composing the plan of our public works, they do not accommodate the interests, nor enlist the feelings of our citizens of Jackson, Scott and Clark counties, nor of those south of the New Albany and Vincennes road, and therefore they complain of its injustice. Of their dissatisfaction, information, both verbal and written, from sources that cannot be disregarded, has been communicated to the governor, that he may make it known to the legislature. In the last named counties, delegates have been sent to a convention at Jasper to deliberate upon measures for the promotion of their wishes, and through their representatives here, the character of the improvements proposed, and the extent of their claims upon the patronage of the state will be made known to the legislature. But whilst they complain, they acknowledged their obligations to the state, and mindful of their duty, they are ready, now as heretofore, to sustain the state in her measures, and to respect the supremacy of her laws. Good policy would seem to dictate a course that will quiet these claims and unite these small districts in interest and feeling with the other portions of the state, and I recommend the subject to your serious considerations.

During the same session, but a few days later, Mr. Proffit presented a resolution calling on the committee on canals and internal improvements to inquire into the expediency of constructing a turn-pike road from Evansville to Washington, by way of Princeton and Petersburg, and also one from Paoli to Mt. Carmel, by way of French Lick, Portersville, and Petersburg. Thus he endeavored to make Petersburg the crossing point of two improved highways. At one time, B. R. Edmonston, of the "Convention of Jasper," presented a petition in the house of representatives asking for a state road from Jasper to the mouth of White river. This "Convention of Jasper" was a voice in the wilderness calling for means of transportation, and the state highways now under construction

in Dubois and adjoining counties are part of the delayed answer.

Many pioneer speeches were delivered to win future votes for an internal improvement in the home county, or to tickle the fancy and raise the pride in the folks back home. The Wabash and Erie canal and its various branches, constituted a subject of serious consideration in Mr. Proffit's day. The routes of the canals were also a matter upon which an honest difference could exist. Various towns on the Ohio river demanded a terminal and great was the excitement months before even the surveys were made. It was under such circumstances that one of Mr. Proffit's canal speeches was delivered. As a future vote-getter in pioneer days as a high praise of the generosity and public spirit of the men of his own counties of Dubois and Pike, and as a collection of flowery compliments, it is so classic, that even Lord Chesterfield himself, might have to look to his laurels. The entire speech appears in the *Indiana Democrat* January 13, 1832. The speech was delivered in the legislature, in January, 1832, when Mr. Proffit represented the counties of Dubois and Pike. Arouse ye sleeping politicians of today, wipe off the dew-drops that sparkle on your garments, and listen to what the voters used to hear or read in days gone by. Mr. Proffit's speech is too long to copy here, but listen to this extract:

I stand upon this floor, sir, the wakeful guardian of the rights and interest of two counties, southern counties, sir, far distant from the scene of this contemplated work and non-expectants of a share in the distribution of its funds; we are as little interested in the work as any portion of the state can possibly be, but, sir, I have generous and liberal constituents, men, who in charging me to watchfulness and wisdom, mean not that I should indiscriminately oppose any measure, no matter how important, because not immediately conducive to their interest; men who would regret to see their feelings and generosity misrepresented in this hall by me their sentinel, sounding the alarm cry of danger, and no danger to be apprehended; shouting the fearful word "taxation" and no contribution asked. No sir, we care not where a work of character and importance is projected without jeopardizing the monied interest of the state, north or south, east or west, it shall have our fostering hand extended over it and it shall command our untiring exertions to its advancement and success.

This address falls musically upon the ear and awakens slumbering memories of men and events. It brings a smile, for the amount of state taxes paid by his two counties was very small. In 1829, in Dubois county, it was only \$209.68, and that included some delinquent taxes and penalties. This speech had foresight in it. The southern arm of the canal was built by way of Petersburg to Evansville. Mr. Proffit occasionally used this pun, at his own expense, "I am not only a Proffit but the son of a Proffit."

Mr. Proffit and the people of Dubois county had a vision of a railroad from New Albany, through Dubois county, to Mount Carmel, Illinois. On Saturday, January 7, 1837, Mr. Proffit presented in the house of representatives, a petition signed by sundry citizens of Dubois county praying for a rail or macadamised road from New Albany to Mount Carmel. A bill was passed to incorporate the "Mount Carmel and New Albany Railroad Company." Ten days later he was fighting in the Indiana house of representatives for an appropriation of \$150,000 for a road from Rockport to Jasper, and a continuation from Jasper, by the most eligible route to the Central canal, but before he could complete the work the house adjourned. The case was lost, so to speak, by a vote of 41 to 49. The Wabash and Erie canal and the Michigan road were financially helped by land grants, so why not aid other public enterprises? On June 6, 1838, Senators John Tipton and O. H. Smith had a bill before the United States senate to grant to the Mount Carmel and New Albany railroad company of Indiana, the alternate sections of the public land on the route of the road, on condition that the company should carry the United States mail for twenty years and its troops, arms, and munitions of war, forever free of expense. It was ably defended by the two Indiana senators. The bill was amended and then made a special order for the next day. It was not passed, yet, the Southern railroad is the vision that came true. Do you recognize it? It is the Biblical Jacob's ladder to the Knobs, and its branches now cover ten out of the eleven counties in Mr. Proffit's old district.

Mr. Proffit did excellent work in the Indiana house of representatives, but he never became a state senator. Fortune



failed him in that ambition, for Judge Elisha Embree, who was rather conservative on the question of internal improvements, defeated Mr. Proffit for the state senate, about 1833; and, in 1847, was elected to congress over Robert Dale Owen. Pike county was kindly disposed toward Mr. Proffit. In the congressional race of 1839, in Pike county, Mr. Proffit received 478 votes; Mr. Owen 227. Robert Dale Owen succeeded Mr. Proffit, in 1843, and Judge Elisha Embree succeeded Owen, in 1847.

You who love to ramble down the dusty corridors of yestercity and who love to draw the curtains and peep into the mysteries of long ago, may study the traditions and read the printed pages of the annals of time, from the first dawn of written history to the twilight of yesternight and you may not find a character to parallel that of Abraham Lincoln—the child of Kentucky, the boy of Indiana, the young man of Illinois, the man of America, and, father of freedom who now belongs to the ages; and, you must not forget that he lived here among us, in the days when Clay, Proffit, Brackenridge, and other political orators were making the welkin ring, and he drank in such speeches as only they were able to deliver. Mr. Proffit was a political factor in southern Indiana before the Lincoln family moved to Illinois. He was full of political efficiency, of rare personal service, and of rich southern humor and, no doubt was enjoyed by Abraham Lincoln, for both Lincoln and Proffit knew there was more human nature in the world than anything else.

Mr. Proffit was known over all of Indiana from the Ohio river to the shifting sand-dunes of the lake counties. It appears that his was the pride and flower of the Hoosier oratory of his day. He was magnetic, popular, and successful; there radiated from him vigor, health and happiness. His presence was felt wherever he was. It is said he had the ability to give back to an audience its own thoughts and conceptions, illuminated, purged, perfected perhaps magnified, and transfigured until the product was better than the audience could produce, and by this art he won approval because he understood and was understood. He had the power to express a soul's emotion and appreciation. Occasionally he could make the place where he stood breathe forth an atmosphere of

dreams and fancies. Washington used long words; Lincoln used short words, as did most pioneers in southern Indiana, except in the writing of legal documents, but Mr. Proffit ran to neither extreme.

In his oratorical peregrinations over the state of Indiana, no doubt he went well prepared for his addresses, even to the extent of seven fingers. "Loaded seven fingers" was a pioneer expression meaning that a muzzle-loading gun of those days was so heavily charged that the ramrod stood out seven inches above the muzzle. The expression came to mean "well prepared", as for a speech. He could deliver a virile, pulsating American political speech, whenever necessary. Early pioneer orators were long on the glories of liberty and freedom, the rights of man, and kindred generalities, and usually full of historical and political platitudes. Mr. Proffit was so constituted, that if he fell in an undertaking, he would fall like a strong man; he would not hesitate to embrace the pillars of a house and pull the house down upon him. He was a master of sentences and could build them well balanced and full of grace, dignity, and ever increasing interest. He seemed always able to charm, fascinate, and carry away his hearers. He had the power to transform dry logic into sentiment.

There was an aristocratic southern color about him that was not altogether without its punishment and rewards. According to all accounts we have of him he was a pioneer orator in demand even in the elite east. His speeches do not have the breadth and depth of Webster, those of very few orators do, but in the mere use of words many of his sentences come upon us with a fancied Websterian ring of college days. He had a gift of words and a facility of expression, the result of much choice reading and careful study. For a western orator, his orations had an unusually wide range of thought, imagination, and broad appeal.

Under the uninvited questions that come from a modern political crowd, the rounded periods of the olden times, that embodied the eloquence of the past, have disappeared; and hard knocks, close reasoning, and pointed questions demanding a direct answer have taken their places.

In their stump speeches, during the heat of political campaigns very often our local pioneer orators used noisy rhetoric,

tossed out big adjectives and stinging epithets, and made real exaggerations. They brought this fiery oratory from the south. Mr. Proffit, himself, could make stinging adjectives cluster about an opponent's name, as honey-bees gather about the wild flowers of the countryside. There was a great deal of solemn humbug in frontier politics of eighty years ago. As a rule many pioneer speeches show superlative degrees, excessive tastes, and vicious language. They often contained much scurrility and abuse of the opposite party. Jackson used to say he had won all his battles, defeated all his enemies, and rewarded all his friends. In pioneer days the rancorous animosities of politics led to many a fist-fight. These early campaigns, usually grumbled with thunder, but in time, the violent eddies in the stream were flowing smoothly to the sea.

Among Mr. Proffit's political or oratorical peers or opponents may be mentioned three men, all strong and prominent Democrats, all sturdy and successful men of their day and exceedingly worthy and honorable, and all eventually members of the constitutional convention of 1850. They show the power and make of men with whom he had to compete. Mr. Proffit's most prominent opponents were Benjamin Rose Edmonston, Judge James Lockhart, and Robert Dale Owen.

Benj. R. Edmonston was a man of large, physical frame and great personal courage. He was devoted and strong in his attachments to principles or friends and ever ready to defend them. He was always bitter in his denunciations of what he considered wrong. These traits in his character fitted him to be a leader in the days of the early settlement of Dubois county, when personal encounters often settled the political status of a neighborhood or county. Many times before he was of age he demonstrated his physical strength in "fist and skull" encounters with the champions of his political opponents, as was customary in pioneer days. He weighed over two hundred pounds and when flat-boating was the means of transportation, he would frequently shoulder a barrel of corn and carry it upon the boat—a feat ordinarily requiring two men. He had more than an average intellectual ability, although having only the scant education the "bab schools" of that day afforded. He was a successful public debater and stump orator in the then First congressional district. He was

a presidential elector of this district in 1844 and cast his vote for James Knox Polk. His style was fervid and pointed, more calculated to arouse enthusiasm in his own party than to win over persons from the opposite party. Edmonston had red hair, a florid complexion, and usually wore a red flannel shirt. His friends called him "Red Rover." He was a native of Buncombe county, North Carolina, and was always jealous of the honor of his native state, but not given much to the use of "buncombe." His political speeches were spiced with his own solos, for he was a good singer. He was born March 8, 1807, died in August, 1856, and his remains lie buried in Dubois county. Benj. R. Edmonston was a member of the house during the 20th, 24th, 28th, and 33rd sessions, was state senator during the 29th, 30th, and 31st sessions of the Indiana legislature, a member of the last state constitutional convention, sheriff of Dubois county, and, at the time of his death, one of the state canal commissioners.

In the *Western Sun*, April 26, 1836, appears a column letter dated at Jasper, March 31, 1836. It is signed by Benj. Rose Edmonston. It is one of the very first letters, dated at Jasper, to find its way to a printed page. The letter is well written, full of political data, Biblical references, and the political irony of the day. It is directed against George H. Proffit, who was a candidate for state representative for Pike and Dubois counties. Few could compose a better letter today. However, Mr. Proffit was elected and served during the session which opened on the following December, and it was during that session he presented his railroad petitions.

Mr. Proffit's store at Portersville, not over eight miles from Mr. Edmonston's country mansion, may have been a Whig listening post for the purpose of prolonging Whig supremacy in Dubois county, for the county had been under Whig local government from its organization until 1839, when the Democrats came into county power, and remained there even unto this day. The Whig party, in Dubois county, went out with the smoking embers of the old log court house at Jasper, while its successor, the Republican party, has never been able to obtain a substantial foothold in the purely local and county government.

Judge James Lockhart was a man of acknowledged talents, a forcible speaker, a sound lawyer, and a good judge; he made no pretense to what is called flowery eloquence, but was rather a matter-of-fact, straightforward speaker and much endeared to his friends. He had few of the arts of the professional orator, and none of that studied grace and polish which some men often utilize in place of solid worth and good judgment; but he was a sober thinker, and never addressed an audience without conveying a message of value. He was "formed on the good old plan, a true and brave democratic man." Well poised with the serenity of calm judgment, he was duly and truly prepared to serve his people in the exalted position he held, but the voters did not send him to congress in his first attempt, in the year 1839. Judge Lockhart is described as being tall, large, and portly, forehead prominent, hair and eyes dark. He was a most valuable member of the late constitutional convention of Indiana. He represented the counties of Pike and Vandenburg, and stood by the ancient landmarks with great firmness. He was the first judge to formulate a code of rules for the government of his circuit courts. He died while a member of congress, having served in 1851, 1852, and 1857.

Robert Dale Owen was a Democrat of great force in the state. It was mainly through the efforts of Robert Dale Owen, a Scotchman, that the women of Indiana finally secured the right to own and control their separate property during marriage; the right to their own earnings; the widow's absolute ownership of her part of the deceased husband's property; and a woman's right to divorce a husband for habitual drunkenness and cruelty. He is so prominently connected with the pioneer history and development of southern Indiana that the writer may as well carry roses to New Castle as to place a laurel on his brow.

Mr. Owen was a man small in stature, with a large forehead, light hair and eyes, and prominent features. He looked like a sturdy Scotchman, recently from the "Land o' Cakes." He was a man of many parts and in early life wrote a play called "Pocahontas." He was a man of literary ability, a reformer, and a statesman. He was born at Glasgow, Scotland, November 7, 1801. His family became connected with the

New Harmony pioneer enterprise, a subject too large to mention now except by name. Robert Dale Owen was considered one of the best educated, most intelligent, and most influential men of his day in southern Indiana.

On August 5, 1839, Mr. Owen and Mr. Proffit were candidates for congress, and Mr. Proffit was elected. Mr. Owen carried the counties of Orange, Posey, Warrick, and Dubois; and Mr. Proffit carried Gibson, Harrison, Crawford, Spencer, Vandenburg, Perry, and Pike. In 1877, in an article published in *Scribner's Monthly*, Mr. Owen gave this incident of that campaign:

I may mention here, as illustrative of the style of thought and idiomatic expression among the simple people with whom I had made my home, an incident of later date, when I was in the field for congress against George H. Proffit. It was in a rustic portion of the district, and after I had spoken I had been invited as usual to spend the night at a neighboring farmer's. Happening to sit, during the evening, on my host's front porch, I overheard, from just 'round the corner of the cabin, the conversation of two men who did not suppose I was within ear-shot. Their talk was, as usual, of the candidates:

"Did you hear Owen speak?" asked one.

"Yes," said the other, "I hearn him."

"Now, ain't he a hoss?" was the next question.

"Well, yes; they're both blooded nags; they make a very pretty race."

Seldom, indeed, were better blooded men than Proffit and Owen entered for congressional sweepstakes.

Later, Mr. Owen became a member of congress and served his district well. While in congress he was a prominent character. He introduced a bill creating the Smithsonian Institution, and for many years afterwards he was one of its regents. At the south steps of the state house stands a bronze statue of Mr. Owen. The inscription reads:

1801—1877

An Appreciation

Erected in 1911 in honor of Robert Dale Owen by the women of Indiana in recognition of his efforts to obtain for them education privileges and legal rights.

Author, Statesman, Politician, Philanthropist.

"Write me as one who loved his fellow men."

In the musty tomes of congress are to be found many speeches of John Lockhart, Robert Dale Owen, and Mr. Proffit. In the Indiana constitutional convention of 1850, Mr. Owen was considered the best writer of correct English. The names of Edmonston, Lockhart, and Owen, in the order named, appear in their own chirography on the original engrossed parchment copy of the state constitution of 1850 in the spread-eagle signatures of pioneer days. That is the document referred to when you hold up your hand and swear "to support the constitution of the state of Indiana," etc. These men have been given full consideration that you may form an idea of the men with whom Mr. Proffit found it necessary to compete for the honors he earned. The highest honors to these men came after Mr. Proffit had passed to the great beyond. In the beginning of the race for congress, in 1839, Judge Lockhart was nominated, at Jasper, on what was then known as the "Van Buren ticket." It was the first congressional convention ever held at Jasper. In time Judge Lockhart withdrew and Robert Dale Owen was substituted. Mr. Proffit's election over Mr. Owen drew the attention of voters from distant states, because of Mr. Owen's religious principles.

Geo. H. Proffit was educated in English and French, and belonged to one of the leading families of Louisiana, where his grandfather held the office of surveyor-general under the French government. He came to Pike county about 1828 at the age of twenty-one, and engaged in the merchandise business. He is spoken of as "a merchant of the twenties." He became a member of the Indiana legislature and served several terms with distinction. He served in congress two terms. The east and south regarded him as a brilliant son of Indiana. Much praise was showered upon him by Whig papers of about 1840, during the Tippecanoe and Tyler campaign. He was a true southerner and was very fond of politics, hunting, fishing, and horse racing. In that respect he was akin to Daniel Webster of the same day and generation. Webster outlined many of his famous orations, and committed some to memory while fishing in the streams in and about Marshfield, his New England estate. Mr. Proffit was perhaps as good a fisherman as Peter of old, and he was also a fairly good fisher of men and votes for many years, as is evident from his political record.

Mr. Proffit may have constructed many of his flowery sentences while fishing in Mill creek, and in Patoka, and White rivers.

Oliver H. Smith, whose face may be seen upon a copper tablet in the waiting room of the Union Station, at Indianapolis, and who was the author of *Early Indiana Trials and Sketches*, a valuable pioneer volume of 1857, had a personal acquaintance with George H. Proffit. Senator Smith served his state in the senate, at Washington, while Mr. Proffit was a member of congress from Indiana. In his book Senator Smith has this to say of Mr. Proffit:

In the great campaign of 1840, which resulted in the triumph of General Harrison, there were few speakers of greater prominence than George H. Proffit of Petersburg, Pike county. He was in person below the medium size, short, slim, and spare, a good mouth, head small, high forehead, cheeks bony, dark eyes, light brown hair. He was quick and ready, his voice remarkably loud and clear, and he possessed a fluent elocution and a fertile imagination. The greater power of Mr. Proffit was on the stump before the people. I first became acquainted with him at Washington City, while he was in the house of representatives. He very soon made his mark in the House, and rose to a highly respectable position as a ready debater. As a popular speaker, in addressing the masses, few stood higher in the East. One evening, after dark, I was passing down the avenue from Capitol Hill, at Washington, when I noticed a large gathering up at the City Hall. I walked up, and found it to be a political Harrison meeting. Many transparencies were exhibited. General Walter Jones, the president, was seated on the platform, surrounded by vice-presidents. Just as I reached the skirts of the crowd, General Jones rose, and at the top of his voice said: "Is the Honorable George H. Proffit of Indiana in the assembly? If so he will come forward and address the audience." A voice in the crowd, "Mr. Proffit is unable to speak tonight. He exhausted himself at Wilmington last night." General Jones: "We are sorry to hear it, the people want to hear Mr. Proffit. Is Caleb Cushing of Massachusetts in the crowd?" A voice: "Yes, Mr. Cushing is here." "Let him come up to the stand." I was much gratified to see our Proffit stand higher with the multitude as a speaker, than Mr. Cushing, the distinguished orator of Massachusetts. Mr. Cushing took the stand and spoke over an hour. I heard few such speeches during the campaign. He was rather taller than Mr. Proffit, inclined to baldness, wide mouth and dark hair. He was fluent, loud, rapid and animated. The only fault I could find at the time with his speech, was its extreme bitterness against the Democratic party. I had been much on the stump in that contest, had heard many distinguished men, and my observation had satisfied me that soft words



and hard arguments was the true policy. The sun, and not the wind, made the traveler part with his cloak.

Mr. Proffit abandoned the Whig cause with his friends—Cushing, Wise, Upshur, Gilmer, Spencer, Irwin, and a few others, in 1841. His name was more fortunate than theirs, in not being rejected by the Senate. The reason, however, was that Mr. Tyler wisely withheld the nomination of Mr. Proffit until after the Senate adjourned, and then sent him to Brazil as our Charge. The senate at the next session refused to confirm the nomination, and he returned soon after, in very bad health, lingered for some time, and died at the city of Louisville. The last time I was at Petersburg I visited his tomb. As I stood silently by his grave, he seemed to rise as in the day of his pride before me, and then sink back to his mother earth. How soon we pass from active life to the sleep of death!

Mr. Proffit is interestingly spoken of in *A Tour Through Indiana in 1840*, a delightful and charming Indiana production from the pen of Mrs. Kate Milner Rabb. Mr. Owen is also mentioned with becoming grace and dignity. This wonderfully well drawn pen picture of the pioneer days of Indiana deserves a careful perusal if you are interested in the subject of this paper, and his day and generation with its barbecues, speeches, and processions. Politicians in Mr. Proffit's day did things and took chances no one would dare attempt in Indiana today. In 1840, Martin Van Buren was the Democratic candidate for re-election as president, and William Henry Harrison was the Whig candidate. It was during this campaign that Mr. Proffit rendered heroic work for the Whigs.

On page 342, of Goodspeed's *History of Pike and Dubois Counties*, we find this notice of Mr. Proffit:

During the "twenties" George H. Proffit came to Petersburg and engaged in merchandising. He later turned his attention to law and politics, especially the latter. He was a shrewd politician and an orator of great brilliancy, etc.

Thus a commercial history dismisses its mention of one of the most wonderful men accredited to Pike county.

It is related of Mr. Proffit that once upon his return from Washington, he brought with him a very fine carriage, carry-all or barouche, the first ever seen in Pike county. It was drawn by a team of dashing horses with a set of flashy harness. As was usual in those days, there was a large basket meeting

in the neighborhood of Petersburg. Mr. and Mrs. Proffit attended, coming in the carriage, their driver in livery, and Mr. and Mrs. Proffit correctly dressed, silk hat and all, after the fashion of the elite east. The approach of the Proffits created a sensation, and any one who knows the pioneers of the decade of the forties needs no prophet to tell him what result to expect. It practically broke up the meeting. The Proffit turn-out got the crowd, leaving the minister almost without a congregation. The people viewed, admired, and wondered, but the old taxpayers shook their heads, did not approve, and said that hereafter they would not vote for any one who made such a display on the money they were paying him to represent them in congress; that it was too much like royalty and not to the liking of an American citizen of southern Indiana. The amusing part about this is the fact that no other public speaker in Indiana could so bemean and condemn the Van Buren administration in Washington for its extravagancies, aristocratic tendencies and so on, as Mr. Proffit. Yet, Mr. Proffit was dressy, he could not avoid it; he was a cultured, educated, aristocratic man from the south and really at home in the social ways of Washington and the east. The southern cavalier spirit was in him and he could not help it; blood will tell.

Mr. Goodlet Morgan who heard the address used to relate a story to the effect that at one time Mr. Proffit had incurred the displeasure of some of the voters of Petersburg, whether through the defamation of his rivals, the carriage and livery, or some fancied wrongs seems unknown. Having in some way, become aware of this displeasure, Mr. Proffit notified the voters by placards at the voting places that he wished to speak to them once more before they voted. A large crowd gathered to hear him, and he spoke for an hour. At the end of the speech he secured practically every vote in the town, such was the overpowering influence of his eloquence, and the strength of his logic. It is interesting to know that he prepared for this event with the greatest care and the highest regard for "stage setting." He had a platform built with a canopy, dressed his two little daughters in their finest white dresses, and had one of them on each side of him. In beginning his speech he told the crowd that he wanted it to under-

stand that he valued its good opinion and its confidence even as he loved his two little girls. He told the crowd, that he could with fortitude and courage, although with unspeakable grief, follow to the grave the bodies of his beloved children and there stand until the last clod was thrown upon their little coffins, but he confessed that he had not the strength to endure the loss of the confidence of the masses who had so frequently honored him, whom he had sought to serve so faithfully, and whose good opinion he was sure he still deserved. He then proceeded with an exposition of his views and an explanation of his attitude with the result that the whole crowd was with him heart and soul long before he had finished.

In 1842, the Whig party began to separate itself from President Tyler and to detest him. By May, 1843, President Tyler was abandoned by the Whigs and was seeking support for his administration from the Democrats. In the main it was the old banking system that caused the dissatisfaction.

In 1841, Mr. Proffit left the Whig party. He was a turbulent and daring spirit. There was a French cavalier dash in him. His tempestuous public harangues suited the people of the times. His style of oratory was every where received with acclamation and huzzas. When it was known that he was to be present at a political gathering, it added hundreds to the excited throng. His spirit was suited to lead in battle. He was in the front rank as an orator in 1840. Do not blame Mr. Proffit too harshly for leaving the Whigs. He was placed in the front rank where the battle raged the fiercest. He would not accept a rear guard position when the danger was past. Mr. Proffit was a real idol of the common people when political excitement prevailed. His speeches were bold and searching against the Democrats of Van Buren's day.

Under our first constitution, state elections were held annually in August; the legislature convened in December and everybody talked politics. Party conflicts were frequent and extremely animated. Political fist-fights were common; for heated discussions were conducive to ugly words and combats, yet after all, they were sponsors of our present local political knowledge. The early newspapers of Indiana contained very little of what we now call local news. Politics was the chief item of interest in pioneer days, and aside from a few brief

items from the outside world column after column was given over to the discussion of national and state political questions. Political booklets, or tracts, were printed and circulated, and in this way Indiana eventually became a close state, politically. Many of the booklets were severe in tone and argument.

Mr. Proffit's biography gives us valuable glimpses of the days when Indiana was in the turmoil of annual elections in the dog days of every August. No sooner was one election over, than they began their stump speeches for revenge at the next general election. Today when a man is a candidate for congress we are permitted to speak to him as "running for congress." In pioneer days a candidate for congress was spoken of as "standing a poll for congress."

In 1839, the Whig candidates for the nomination to congress in the first district were John A. Brackenridge, G. Burton Thompson and Geo. H. Proffit. Mr. Proffit was nominated at Rockport. He received five votes out of the eight that were cast. The convention was conducted on the county unit system. The votes of Dubois, Pike, Gibson, Vanderburg, and Posey were cast for Mr. Proffit. Each county had one vote. Crawford county voted for Senator G. Burton Thompson, of Perry county, while Spencer and Warrick voted for Brackenridge. Perry, Orange, and Harrison were not represented at the convention. In this convention Simon Morgan, John Hurst, and Dr. A. B. McCrillus, one of the founders of Jasper, represented Dubois county. Pike county was represented by M. W. Foster, John W. Posey, and Albert Hammond.

In speaking of an address delivered at Freedonia, April 29, 1839, by Mr. Proffit, the *Leavenworth Arena* of May 2, says:

Well may Pike and Dubois boast of their faithful servant—one who has done much for the enlightened and patriotic people that so often honored him with their suffrage. Mr. Proffit's speech was listened to very attentively. Many went to hear him, and at the same time harbored great prejudices against him, but afterwards were thoroughly convinced that he was the people's man—such a man as they would delight to honor.

The extent to which the pioneers would go to defeat a candidate is shown in a copy of the *Hickory Club* a pioneer paper, wherein, among other things, appears this statement:

It is currently reported in this county, and the people generally believe it, that he (Mr. Proffit) kicked the Bible out of his house and in mockery to the Christian religion administered the Lord's supper using cornbread and buttermilk. This is said to be true.

This statement was signed "Harrison County;" however, it was a coward's attack and not a county's. This was also charged against Mr. Proffit, in earlier campaigns in Pike and Dubois counties, but these charges were never substantiated. Time after time Mr. Proffit challenged any man to prove 'his charge against him. One slanderer said "Mr. Proffit administered the sacrament with whiskey, etc." This is mentioned here as an example of pioneer politics. Judge James Lockhart started to make this race for congress in 1839, but in time, Robert Dale Owen was substituted and became the Democratic candidate; then the "concoctors of the buttermilk slander" had all they could do to clear up another religious controversy. The "buttermilk slander" became so extensively circulated that ministers and other church people finally carded the papers as follows:

Petersburg, June 12, 1839. We, the undersigned, members of the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches of Pike county having understood that a report has been circulated that Geo. H. Proffit of this county, kicked the Bible out of his house and administered the Lord's supper with cornbread and buttermilk, and was guilty of other disorderly and unbecoming conduct, deem it a duty incumbent on us, as good citizens and as Christians, to pronounce it a vile falsehood. Many of us have been acquainted with Mr. Proffit several years, from his first settling in this state, and he could not have been guilty of such improper behavior without it coming to our knowledge, and we regret that any person should be guilty of such gross falsehood as to charge Mr. Proffit with such conduct.

(REV.) JAMES RITCHEY,  
(REV.) DAVID HORNADY,  
SAMUEL STUCKY, JR.,  
(REV.) H. P. DEBRULER,  
SAMUEL STUCKY, SR.

Mr. Proffit's southern accent caused many of his political enemies to believe he was a foreigner. In closing a circular issued during the campaign of 1839, Mr. Proffit says:

I am a native of Louisiana, and every feeling of my heart is truly American. I have resided in this state eleven years, five of which I

have served in the legislature, and I assure you that if you should honor me with your suffrage for the office I seek, every opportunity shall be gladly seized to evince to you my gratitude.

To my competitor personally, I have no objections, he has always treated me as a gentleman, but to me there is a very convincing reason why he should not go to congress. I WISH TO GO MYSELF.

Mr. Proffit's victory, in 1839, was indeed a victory, for it was an early Whig congressional victory in the Pocket. Mr. Proffit won his laurels as an orator before he was thirty-four years of age. At a time when oratory was in flower in the American congress he was an idolized, popular Whig leader and a far-famed Hoosier orator, whose speeches were veritable Niagaras of forceful logic and rhetoric. One wonders where this Petersburg merchant acquired his ability and when he found time to keep abreast of the national questions of the day, to such an extent as to attract national recognition.

In August, 1839, George H. Proffit was elected to congress from this district by a vote of 6,008, being 779 more than Robert Dale Owen, the Democrat, received. Mr. Proffit was known at that time as a constructive Whig, yet men were not always known by party names. Politics was very personal. In the Indiana delegation to congress in 1841, all were new men but Mr. Proffit, who alone withstood the political upheaval of the campaign. During Mr. Proffit's last term in congress his associates were Andrew Kennedy, Henry S. Lane, Richard W. Thompson, and David Wallace, all exceptionally strong men. This election gave Mr. Proffit a prominence in Indiana and in many eastern states. The presidential campaign of 1840 was much of a frolic on the part of the Whigs. There were many jubilant and uproarious expressions of imprisoned mirth and fun on the part of the voters, and anything like calmness of judgment and real seriousness of purpose seemed to be absent from the Whig camp. Harrison was presented to the Whigs as a "poor man's friend"—while Van Buren was proclaimed an aristocrat. The Whigs charged President Van Buren with using golden spoons, with planting mulberry trees in the White House grounds, and with other so-called extravagances, etc. The Whigs claimed he was so "slick" that he should have planted "slippery elms." His enemies referred to him as the "Kinderhook Wizard." General Harrison's mili-

tary record was magnified greatly by the Whigs, a common custom in those days, borrowed from the Jackson Democrats. In the congressional election of 1840, when Geo. H. Proffit was again elected to congress, he received 190 votes in Dubois county while Judge Lockhart received 202. Mr. Proffit served in congress from March 4, 1839, to March 3, 1843. At that time Mr. Proffit was rated as a Whig, and since then few Whigs or Republicans, as such, ran any better races in Dubois county. Pioneer voters were men usually of few words and they were usually for a man, or against a man. It was not always a party question. Voters made no half-way choice. If they had no use for a man, they never told him to go to limbus; they told him to go all the way down. An idea of what was uppermost in the minds of people at any given time may be obtained from the subjects of their orations. In 1828 the fourth-day-July was celebrated by public speaking in nearly all parts of Indiana. Here are some of the toasts—"The Day We Celebrate," "Washington," "The Sages and Heroes of the Revolution," "The Cause of Liberty," "Greece," "The Present Administration of the General Government," "The American System," "Internal Improvements," "The Spirit of the Times," "Indiana," "The New Purchase," "The Army and the Navy." In 1830, some of the toasts were "The Day—The brightest and most glorious in the annals of freedom," "Gen. George Washington—the name conveys sufficient meaning," "The Heroes of the Revolution—may their fame be as immortal as the struggle was glorious," "Charles Carroll—the only survivor of the noble band who signed the Declaration of Independence," etc., etc. This was at a period in our history when, at least once a year, there was a feast of patriotism and a flow of patriotic oratory—a holiday that should by all means be revived.

In pioneer days toasts were the usual mode of expressing thought and sentiment. They were emphasized in various ways, such as—"Six cheers and one gun," "four cheers and one gun," "six cheers and two guns," "standing in silence," "three cheers," etc. In those days in southern Indiana political discussions and polemic societies were conducive to offhand oratory with perhaps equal parts of logic and noise. Political processions came into general use in the campaign

of 1840, and an accomplished orator was a dangerous opponent. In pioneer days a cheap politician was called a "rabble-rouser." The word explains itself, when separated exactly in the middle. Mr. Proffit was nearly the opposite of a cheap politician, but he knew human nature and he could hand out compliments with the skill of an artist. A few of the pioneer voters could spit tobacco into either eye of the family cat contentedly sleeping, with its back to a fireplace, ten feet distant, for there was a lot of plain living and some high thinking going on at the same time, in many a log cabin along the banks of the drowsy, sleepy, Patoka river, that beavers' paradise of gentle curves and graceful meanderings. The inhabitants felt honored at being designated and appealed to as taxpayers, American patriots and citizens, holding the destiny of a nation in the hollow of their hands. Mr. Proffit knew cabin life as well as that of Washington. He had touched life on many sides, and was in sympathy with the needs, hopes, and ambitions of our pioneers, but patriotism was his pole-star after all; politics the means to an end.

In those early days a barbecue was a free-will offering on the altar of patriotism or politics, a great outdoor feast of the **very fat of the land**. The stump-speech system of electioneering was prevalent. It came to the Pocket from the south. Its peculiar advantages over the convention system of the east gave it a preference for many years. It was a school for offhand orators, and many of the statesmen of eighty years ago learned how to speak in the old-time political campaigns. In pioneer days, strong men like Mr. Proffit often went into public life from an inward call and a love of the highest distinction, often to the sacrifice or injury of their health or fortune. Distinction was the reward. In those days it was not exactly the caprice of fashion, not the accident of high rank, and not a distinguished social position that established a man's reception in a community—to do that it usually took his politics, or his position on some great state or national issue.

The Van Buren marker, at Plainfield, and the Van Buren Hill near Brazil, are amusing reminders of the days of early travel over the old Cumberland road. Mr. Proffit was a strong advocate for the completion of the Cumberland road, the great



national highway through Indiana, and on February 8, 1840, wrote the *Spirit of '76*, a Whig paper of Indianapolis, blaming the Van Buren administration for lack of support to the great highway. On the 14th of June, 1840, Mr. Proffit wrote the same paper denouncing Tilghman Howard, the Democrat candidate for governor of Indiana, for leaving his seat in congress to look after his political fences at home, while bills for the up-keep of the road were pending in congress. In the *Spirit of '76*, under dates of July 11 and 18, of the year 1840, may be found Mr. Proffit's speech, delivered in the house of representatives, at Washington, on April 27 of that year. It is on the general appropriation bill. It is a severe indictment of Van Buren's administration, and is probably "loaded seven fingers."

Near the opening of his speech Mr. Proffit says:

It required no stretch of intellect to perceive that the order had gone forth to vote down every proposition of the minority; and, sir, up to this hour, that order has been most implicitly obeyed. It comports not with my taste to describe the tumult, the legislative depravity, the utter recklessness which I have here witnessed. It has been but a combination of the disgraceful scene with which our sitting opened; and it is now lamentably palpable that a congress which commenced in revolution, riot, and anarchy, must terminate in disorder and disgrace, etc.

The speech is a long one, and a severe one. In closing, Mr. Proffit said:

I take no pleasure in criticising the course of my government; I know the fallibility of human nature. I regret being compelled to show my fellow-citizens the corruptions of their government. I regret that this corruption exists. I am sorry that the necessity is forced upon me to take any thing like a prominent position in denouncing the conduct of the administration. I know that a faithful discharge will draw down the execrations and base calumnies of the administration presses; our motives impugned; public course misrepresented; private character assailed; 'life's life lied away.' But, sir, I, for one, will pursue my course with the same defying spirit which animated the poet when he exclaimed!

"As little as the moon stops for the baying  
Of wolves, will the bright muse withdraw one ray  
From out her skies—then howl your idle wrath!  
While she still silvers o'er your gloomy path."

On May 14, 1840, in one of Mr. Proffit's speeches in congress he said he did not pretend to be very orderly in congress himself. Thus began the presidential campaign of 1840, with Mr. Proffit making the keynote speeches which were of great assistance in winning the fight for "Tippecanoe and Tyler, too," and for which services it is thought Mr. Tyler about two years later rewarded Mr. Proffit with an appointment to Brazil, but the senate was so hostile to Mr. Tyler, and perhaps to Mr. Proffit, that it did not confirm the appointment. Mr. Proffit was severe in his denunciation of Van Buren's administration, almost to the extent of an iconoclast. He supported General Harrison as a hero worshiper would, in the days of old.

On December 22, 1840, in the house of representatives, at Washington, Mr. Proffit submitted a resolution calling for \$450,000 to be expended on the national road in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois in 1841. He then "in a very animated manner, foretold the direful consequences which he had alleged would ensue, in case the house should not make the appropriation. He declared that:

The eight states of the Northwestern Territory would unite, and in their indignation would make their way into the hall to obtain their rights by force. He could not conceive why the people of that part of the Union should be so treated. The south got appropriations for its Dismal Swamp, and everything else; so, also, did the north; but as for his people, and those of the other northwestern states they could obtain nothing. 'Why!' said he, 'are the people of the West to be thus trampled upon? Mr. Proffitt also discoursed on the grievances of the Western people arising from other causes. He then touched upon nullification, the tariff question, etc., and concluded by giving the House a solemn warning, that in case the resolution should be rejected, the people of the northwest would rise in their might when thier indignation would be an all consuming blaze, without a particle of smoke, which would destroy all that was not right.

Mr. Proffit could well have said to the New England members:

Be strong-backed, brown-handed, upright as your pines;  
By the scale of a hemisphere shape your designs.

for Mr. Proffit did so shape his own designs. During the days when Webster, Calhoun, Benton, Hayne, and Clay were in the senate, and the subtreasury bill was under serious con-

sideration many ugly threats were made by the southern and western leaders and when reminded of it, they pointed to the ugly record of New England in the War of 1812, with its Hartford convention, resolutions, etc., as the school in which they had learned how to threaten the disruption of the Union. When reminded of her selfish attitude in the War of 1812, New England may well hang her proud head in shame. Mr. Proffit was using the Yankee talk, argument, or reasoning, as well as the southern, when he predicted a northwestern revolt, unless the national road was given more financial aid. The south and west learned their line of reason and talk from the scholarly and elite New England, but happily all such talk ended with the Civil war of 1861.

President Tyler vetoed several important bills. This caused much ill feeling between the president and those of the Whigs who still believed that a United States Bank was an absolute necessity. All the cabinet officers resigned except Daniel Webster, (whom General Harrison had made secretary of state), for Webster had started on the great negotiations with England over the boundary line between Maine and Canada. Webster tried his utmost to prevent the break between Tyler and the Whigs. Webster said it would ruin the Whig party, and help neither the bank nor the country. Henry Clay exhausted his power of ridicule and sarcasm in denouncing Mr. Tyler. Whig newspapers attacked Mr. Tyler and prominent Whigs denounced him. Mr. Proffit remained faithful to the president. The Massachusetts Whigs, in 1842, in their convention, declared a final separation of the party from President Tyler. It was the beginning of the end of the Whig party. Some Whigs left the party; the party left some Whigs.

At one time during a discussion about the northeast boundary of Maine, Mr. Proffit objected to the cost of the surveys but he withdrew his objection when informed three lines were to be surveyed. The present boundary as adjusted by Daniel Webster was the middle line. Mr. Proffit was not inclined to "twist the lion's tail," as was often the case in those days, but usually by a cheap grade of politicians.

In July, 1840, the house had before it the case of Lieutenant Hooe, concerning the enlistment of negroes, or other colored

persons in the service of the army or navy of the United States. It seems the conduct of a president in this case did not meet with Mr. Proffit's approval. Mr. Proffit said he was unqualifiedly opposed to the admission of the testimony of colored persons against white men. He approved fully of the laws of the state of Indiana, which provided that no negro, or mulatto, or Indian, or even the quarter-blood, should be admitted as evidence against white persons. He considered the conduct of the president in the case of Lieutenant Hooe as an insult not to be pardoned by any southern man and a direct attack upon the institutions of the south, etc.

On Monday, August 23, 1841, in the house, Mr. Proffit said:

He believed the Whig party was not to be found in these halls; they were to be found at the plough-handles and in the workshops. The Whig party succeeded, by the addition of the old Jackson men, who wished to reform the abuses of the administration. He compared a vetoed bill, which was concocted in the senate to make great men—to make presidents—to a limping animal that stalked up the avenue with a leg of brass and a leg of wood, and finally died with the "Botts." He said he belonged to the corporal's guard; and, if the member from Virginia would permit him, he would march as the humblest member of the forlorn hope. He thought the president (Mr. Tyler) should have a new cabinet; and if he were asked when, he should say NOW. If the present members went out of their own accord, so much the better. He went against Mr. Clay with sorrow, but he never could have Mr. Clay for his president. He felt the chains upon his wrists now; he did not feel them when he advocated Mr. Clay's cause before the people for thirteen long years. He said the name of the bill would be changed before it was passed, and he should not be surprised if its authors stole the title of the much abused Sub-Treasury bill for it. Mr. Proffit defended the president (Mr. Tyler) with eloquence, and to the fullest extent.

On Tuesday night, August 24, 1841, a full length effigy of John Tyler was displayed from a pole in one of the principal streets of Vincennes because in the exercise of a power vested in him by the constitution he vetoed the bill chartering a bank of the United States. Politically, Mr. Proffit fell for his friend John Tyler.

Mr. Tyler's elevation to the presidency, through the death of General Harrison, was America's first lesson—yet not learned—of the danger of being careless in naming a vice-presidential candidate. Mr. Tyler's administration would have been a most distressing failure had not Daniel Webster

remained his secretary of state until he completed his boundary treaty with England; then A. P. Upshur, who signed Mr. Proffit's passport, in time, became Mr. Tyler's secretary of state. Mr. Proffit was before the public at a time of great unrest. Sectional interests were slowly dissolving party lines. The symptoms of the approaching dissolution of the Whig party were clear, but the travail that was to bring into life the Republican party had not yet come to pass. Mr. Proffit was one of the star speakers in the defeat of President Van Buren and the election of Harrison and Tyler. It is to be remembered that Mr. Harrison died soon after his elevation to the presidency, and that Mr. Tyler became president. Mr. Tyler's administration did not meet with the approval of many eastern Whigs, but Mr. Proffit defended him; thus Mr. Proffit became the victim of an enfilading fire from the Van Buren Democrats and the eastern Whigs—some of the very men his vicious attacks upon the Democrats had helped to elect. He proved to be a foeman worthy of their steel, as the records of congress conclusively prove. He insisted upon their votes being recorded on all questions of party policy.

On March 11, 1842, in an address before congress, Mr. Proffit said:

He was endeavoring to do something to relieve the country and to restore the state of the currency. He was for the country; he was determined in the words of Washington, to have no party but this country. If the gentlemen chose to keep up an angry party denunciation, in which he admitted that he had himself too much indulged in the times past, they could do so; but for him—as he grew older he grew wiser. The Whigs had told the people they would endeavor to allay these party dissensions, and pour oil upon the troubled waters; they were pledged to this, and he was resolved to perform it.

On March 18, 1842, in the house:

Mr. Proffit spoke of the bitterness of party spirit at the present session, and the acrimony with which the executive and his supporters on this floor had been attacked; and, added, that many of these gentlemen who had been the most violent in their denunciations, had been seeking office from him.

Mr. Proffit regretted but little had been done by congress. Among other things he said:

Looking, sir, on the political struggles which have agitated and still continue to agitate, this country, names more often than things causing the rally, it is painful to witness the bitter fruits of error committed. No question of domestic policy settled, no particular principle finally established, everything seems to be the sport of the hour, or of the majority temporarily in the ascendant, etc.

In closing this address Mr. Proffit said:

We wish to forget party and think of our country, and our country only. We feel deeply and sensibly the delicate position we occupy, situated, as it were, between two contending parties; but we honestly and firmly believe in the correctness of that position, and will maintain it, convinced that it is our duty to do so, as Republican Representatives.

On May 4 and 19, June 10 and 30, and August 2, 1842, Mr. Proffit was faithfully defending Mr. Tyler on the floor of the house, from attacks made by Whigs as well as by Democrats. In a speech before the house, on June 18, 1842:

Mr. Proffit gave his definition of a Locofoco, whom he considered as a dissatisfied, discontented individual, willing and ready to tear down all government, in the hope that something would turn up to his own advantage. He thought there were Whig-Locofocos as well as Van Buren-Locofocos—men who were always telling the people that they were badly treated.

In 1840, Hanover county, Henry Clay's native county, in Virginia, gave a dinner in honor of Mr. Clay. At that dinner there was given a complimentary toast to Mr. Proffit. The toast reads:

George H. Proffit—surpassed by few in talent—by none in honesty. His country's good has been his object, irrespective of party.

The dinner was given at Taylorsville, Virginia, in the first half of 1840, at which time Mr. Proffit had not been in congress six months. During his first year in congress Mr. Proffit delivered a speech before an audience of ten thousand at West Chester, Pennsylvania. Its effect may be imagined for after the applause had subsided nine cheers were spontaneously given by the assembly. The first year Mr. Proffit was in congress a correspondent of the *New York Herald*, then a neutral paper, wrote his paper as follows:

For an hour and a half, Mr. Proffit kept the House convulsed with laughter. He is decidedly original. He thinks exactly as no other man ever thought or ever will think—as no other mortal ever can think. He is a man of unquestionable talent; and, as a partisan, may be ranked as the most ardent and rabid of the Harrison party. John Randolph once said that he would walk a mile to kick a sheep; and I suppose that Mr. Proffit would traverse the whole of the greater prairies of the West to demolish a locofoco, as such; and yet few men possess, as a man, better feelings than he does. He is always good natured and complacent to all and as he possesses strong conversational powers, a ready, and a rich store of wit, and a large fund of anecdotes, he is popular with all parties. As a representative, he is industrious and attentive to the interests of the people, and may be regarded by them as a faithful and constant agent.

From the records of congress it appears Mr. Proffit was a fiery, extemporaneous speaker, often on the floor and in the heat of debate, but it does not appear that he was ever charged with loquacity. He had done much to elect Harrison and Tyler, who received 234 out of 294 electoral votes. Gen. Harrison was moderately in favor of a bank; Tyler was opposed to a bank. Tyler was a Virginian and not a Whig in its generally accepted term. He was a "state-rights" Whig or Democrat, with emphasis on the compound adjective, and is now generally recorded as a Democrat in our histories. This ticket was elected at a time when the west was supplying presidential candidates and demanding serious consideration. In a sense, Tyler was a Democratic tail to a Whig kite. Had President Harrison lived out his term, it is apparent, Mr. Proffit would have been very powerful in the councils of the party, but Mr. Tyler was not a very popular president, and the burden of defending his administration fell upon such men as Mr. Proffit, who were, to some extent, responsible for his election; thus Mr. Proffit's last term in congress was one of defending the president, a task not in harmony with his aggressive spirit. President Tyler was a Virginia "State-Rights Whig" who became a Democrat and is probably best known as a negative statesman, who quarreled with the Whig leaders, vetoed many bills, among them the fiscal bank bills and the protective tariff bill (of 1842); opposed the Ashburton treaty and the annexation of Texas; and favored the Confederate cause of 1861, etc. In 1840, Mr. Proffit carried Harri-

son's banner, and beat Tyler's drum; they were elected, but Mr. Tyler proved a hard man to justify. The burden fell upon Mr. Proffit to an unusual extent.

On January 10, 1843, in the house, Congressman Botts, of Virginia, brought forward articles of impeachment against President Tyler; who came from his own state. The vote stood 83 yeas and 127 nays. Thus it was decided the president was unimpeached and unimpeachable. Mr. Proffit voted against the impeachment of the president, but said:

For his part, he would have been perfectly willing that the impeachment should have gone on, as he would like to see the black silk gloves, and other trappings of a court of impeachment, but he did not vote for the resolution, because he did not believe in the truth of the charges, or that they contained impeachable matter.

On Friday, March 3, 1843, the last day of his last term, Mr. Proffit, Mr. Wise, and some others, were at the desk of Mr. Fillmore, chairman of the committee of ways and means, examining the manuscript copy of a bill in care of Mr. Fillmore, it being the only one to which the members had access. The chairman told them they *must* take their seats. Mr. Proffit stood for a moment evidently in great astonishment, and then said firmly "*Sir, I will not take my seat.*" A great sensation was instantaneously created, and much confusion ensued. A half dozen gentlemen sprang to the floor and each addressed the chair. Some asserted positively that Mr. Proffit was not out of order, and begged the chairman to bear in mind that the house of representatives was not a school house. During the excitement Congressman Oliver drew Mr. Proffit to his desk and succeeded in pouring oil on the troubled waters, and the affair was allowed to terminate—with Mr. Proffit's congressional career. Those were ugly days in congress and in one of his speeches in the house, Mr. Proffit told the speaker, if he could not get protection from the speaker he would come prepared to protect himself. In those days dueling was not uncommon and many men went armed.

Mr. Proffit is perhaps better known as a Whig, refined, and with a great respect for education and learning. Practically all the old eastern Whigs cultivated dignity and its allied graces, but Mr. Proffit may not have been altogether an ex-



tremist along that line, at least, not to the extent of arrogance. When you once thoroughly know an American gentleman, you can easily recognize a Hoosier gentelman. Mr. Proffit was both.

In 1843, President John Tyler, who filled out the unexpired term of William Henry Harrison, and for whom Mr. Proffit did heroic campaign work, appointed Mr. Proffit envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary, to Brazil. His sheepskin commission reads as follows:

JOHN TYLER

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To GEORGE H. PROFITT, Greeting:

Reposing special trust and confidence in your Integrity, Prudence and Ability, I DO APPOINT YOU, THE SAID GEORGE H. PROFFIT, OF INDIANA, ENVOY EXTRAORDINARY AND MINISTER PLENIPOTENTIARY of the United States of America NEAR HIS MAJESTY, THE EMPEROR OF BRAZIL, authorizing you, hereby, to do and perform all such matters and things as to the said place or office doth appertain, or as may be duly given you in charge hereafter, and the said office to hold and exercise during the pleasure of the President of the United States for the time being, AND UNTIL THE END OF THE NEXT SESSION OF THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES AND NO LONGER.

SEAL

of the

UNITED STATES

In testimony whereof, I have caused the Seal of the United States to be hereunto affixed.

Given under my hand, at the City of Washington, the Seventh day of June in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and forty-three and of the Independence of the United States of America the sixty-seventh.

By the President, JOHN TYLER.

H. S. LEGARE,

Secretary of State *ad interim*.

When Mr. Proffit started for Brazil he had a passport which read as follows:

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA DEPARTMENT OF STATE

To all to whom these presents shall come - - Greeting:

Know Ye, that the bearer hereof George H. Proffit, Esquière, a distinguished citizen of the United States, is proceeding to Rio de Janeiro,

in the character of Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the said United States, near His Majesty the Emperor of Brazil.

These are therefore to request all whom it may concern to permit him and the persons of his suite, to pass freely without let or molestation, and to extend to them all such friendly aid and protection as would in like cases be extended to citizens and subjects of other Countries resorting to the United States in the lawful pursuit of their business.

In testimony whereof, I, A. P. Upshur, Secretary of State of the United States have hereunto set my hand, and caused the Seal of this Department to be affixed, this 19th day of July  
SEAL A. D. 1843, and of the Independence of the United States the sixty-eighth.

A. P. UPSHUR.

The original papers are in the archives of the Indiana University. With the penetrating glance of a seer Mr. Proffit saw in the future, the end of the Whig party, as such, and went over into the camp of the Democrats as did Mr. Tyler, when all was mist and uncertainty to the generality of his contemporaries, and he paid the penalty for his independent judgment. The man that makes a character worthy of history usually makes foes. History is usually very kind to great men; biography is not always so kind. The dignity of history and the truth of biography compel us to speak the language of humility when we say that Mr. Proffit's appointment to Brazil was not confirmed by the United States senate, and he was called home. Perhaps neither the president nor Mr. Proffit expected the appointment to be confirmed. Mr. Proffit served as minister from June 7, 1843, until August 10, 1844.

Senator Thomas H. Benton of Missouri, hated President Tyler and all his friends. He seems to have had a special dislike for Mr. Proffit, who was one of President Tyler's most trusted lieutenants. It is probable that Mr. Proffit had in some of his speeches exposed to ridicule some of Benton's weaknesses, as the latter's ability, however great, was immeasurably exceeded by his vanity. This sort of man always afforded Mr. Proffit an irresistible subject for the exercise of his power of ridicule. Doubtless he had exercised this more than once at Senator Benton's expense. In his *Thirty Years' View*, Senator Benton makes an incorrect statement when he says Mr. Proffit was not received by the emperor of Brazil. Read the following from Senator Benton's works:

At the ensuing session a rapid succession of rejections of nominations took place. Mr. George H. Proffit, of Indiana, late of the House of Representatives, was nominated minister plenipotentiary and envoy extraordinary to the Emperor of Brazil. He had been commissioned in the vacation, and sailed upon his destination, drawing the usual outfit and quarter's salary, leaving the principal part behind, bet upon the presidential election. He was not received by the Emperor of Brazil, and was rejected by the Senate. Only eight members voted for his confirmation: Messrs. Breese, Colquitt, Fulton, Hannegan, King, Semple, Sevier, and Walker. He had been nominated in the place of William Hunter, Esq., ex-senator from Rhode Island, recalled—a gentleman of education, reading, talent and finished manners; and eminently fit for the place. It was difficult to see in Mr. Proffit intended to supersede him, any cause for his appointment except for his adhesion to Mr. Tyler.

Thus, Senator Benton squared things after Mr. Proffit's death for all the ridicule Mr. Proffit may have heaped upon him in his campaign speeches, but he had no reason for saying that Mr. Proffit was not received by the emperor. The details of his formal reception were well known to a number of people at Petersburg who were living twenty or thirty years ago and who heard Mr. Proffit describe the ceremony very minutely. They were greatly amazed that Mr. Proffit (a Pike county merchant) was not much embarrassed in being presented to an emperor, but Mr. Proffit was as Bill Nye said of Benjamin Franklin: "To him a king was no greater than a seven spot."

That Mr. Proffit was very prominent in congress for a young member, however, is revealed occasionally through Senator Benton's work; for instance, in writing of the attempt to pass the national bank bill, in 1841, when the measure had been vetoed by Tyler, and the attempt was being made to pass it in the House over the presidential veto (an attempt which was opposed by Mr. Proffit and in which he was successful, since the effort failed) Benton says:

It was disapproved and returned to the House with a message stating his objections to it, where it gave rise to some violent speaking, more directed to the personal conduct of the President than to the objections to the bill stated in his message. In this debate Mr. Botts, of Virginia, was the chief speaker on one side, inculpating the President; Mr. Gilmer, of Virginia, and Mr. Proffit, of Indiana, on the other were the chief respondents in his favor

It is quite evident from Senator Benton's reference to it that this debate was a very important one and attracted wide attention at the time. The President still had a large number of powerful and very able friends in both houses. The fact that Mr. Proffit was put forward as one of the two chosen orators and debaters to bear the brunt of the battle, selected from all the eloquent, able, and brilliant men in the House who were still Tyler's friends, is a tribute to his ability, that even his enemies could not ignore. Mr. Proffit had just passed his thirty-fourth birthday at the time of this debate. He was still on his first term as a representative in congress.

Senator Benton's reference to the fact that only eight senators voted to confirm Mr. Proffit's nomination as minister to Brazil contains nothing of reproach to Mr. Proffit personally, since these were the eight who stood by Tyler to the end. Caleb Cushing received but two votes, all the others in the senate being cast against approval of his appointment to an important post. At that time there were only about fifty members in the senate.

Sydney George Fisher, a well known biographical writer, in his *The True Daniel Webster* does not write very complimentary of Senator Benton, but classes him as a man of distorted views.

Evidently Mr. Proffit had sufficient grounds for attacking Senator Benton, and he did it while the senator was living. Senator Benton was a relay speaker in the long debates between Senator Hayne and Daniel Webster. Webster had to defeat both of them and he did it with becoming grace and dignity. Here is a quotation from one of Senator Benton's speeches:

Every canal and every road tending to draw the commerce of the western states across the Alleghany Mountains is an injury to the people of the West. They must trade with New Orleans and make that their great city.

Benton was opposed to the great national road through Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, etc. That was enough to destroy any community of interest between him and Mr. Proffit, to say nothing of the senator's attempt to unite the west with

the south. Senator Benton's opinion of Mr. Proffit will not cause Mr. Proffit to lose any friends.

Naturally Mr. Proffit's adhesion to Tyler in the break with the Whig party lost him many Whig friends locally and gained him few among the Democrats. He was accused of deserting his party for the sake of office. Judge Foster, a local Whig of great influence and prominence, always insisted that Mr. Proffit had clung to Tyler with the expectation of receiving the appointment to Brazil. At this day, this does not seem probable. Mr. Proffit seems to have stood by Tyler from the very first when there could have been no immediate hope or expectation of reward; and indeed no desire for such at the hands of the President, since Mr. Proffit's ability would have brought almost any office he may have desired within his reach, provided it was within the power of his party to grant it. He was accused of having turned to be a Democrat, but as he was not active after his return from Brazil, his health having failed, it is problematical just what his stand would have been. It is unthinkable that having attained the heights when most men are just beginning a career, he would have thrown all away for the sake of an appointment of any kind when the highest places in the land were open to him. It is probable that he conceived it to be his duty to stand by the President and did so until he was gradually estranged from his party. He became involved to such an extent in the bitter personal quarrels that followed, and was so goaded on, that he reached the point where he had to stand with Tyler to the end.

Apparently Mr. Proffit had been well received in Brazil, and his recall home reminds us of the wisdom of old, "A prophet is not without honor save in his own country and in his own house." In 1841, when Mr. Proffit went over to the opposite party it caused quite a disturbance among the Whigs in Indiana. He was not a "Clay for President" man. In the Whig convention of May, 1844, Mr. Clay was nominated, but he was defeated by the Democratic candidate, James Knox Polk, of Tennessee. In this Clay campaign of 1844, the Whigs used to sing a song to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne;" one stanza ran:

Leave vain regrets to errors past  
Nor cast the ship away—  
But nail your colors to the mast  
And strike for Henry Clay.

This was the campaign in which Mr. Proffit could not, or did not, "strike for Henry Clay."

The word W-H-I-G (We hope in God) is a time honored English term for those who opposed power and upheld the cause of liberty. In America, many men, whose sons became Republicans, took the name Whig when they felt it their mission or duty, to oppose what they termed the tyranny of Andrew Jackson. Abraham Lincoln, the great Republican, and greater American, became a Republican by the Whig route. One of the most tiresome notions of pioneer political days was that "a statesman must remain perfectly consistent from childhood to old age and never change his opinions." Even unto this day some people hold to this theory, not only in politics but in many other things. Such a doctrine is usually an enemy to progress, since it practically rules out the intelligence and the conscience of a candidate for office.

Many pioneers who came from the south, soon became prominent forensic orators. They did not always possess qualities essential in great lawyers, or deep thinkers, but they were effective as public speakers on the political issues of the day. From the Pocket the easy way to the open door of the world was by whiskey, the rivers, and politics. When our local pioneers spoke of "going to town," they meant to New Orleans. Not a few of our early statesmen came here from Louisiana, and much early business was transacted at New Orleans. It was our early market, and thereby much Mexican silver was brought to Indiana. Strange as it may seem, the Mexican dollar constituted the larger part of the coin of the pioneers in 1837.

Mr. Proffit was a man of ability and of serene soul. He was endowed with a delightfully joyous nature. He radiated good cheer and did not live by his hates alone. He was one of the best citizens of Pike county. American born with American ideals, he cherished America's traditions and honor. In the twilight of local history he represented the noblest ideals of local American life. All his short years were devoted to

serving the best interests of his country and the local people. To every worthy movement he gave his encouragement and support. How full is that page in the early history of Indiana when Mr. Proffit was an orator! He had an air of confidence, success, and gaiety. His features were sharply cut, refined, and delicate. The biography of this man is a pioneer history of his district, a measuring-rod of pioneer politics and Hoosier progress in southern Indiana. His name added not only a dignity and a spirit, but also an orator to the political influence in the Pocket. Perhaps after all, "the proper study of mankind is man."

Some pioneers could be referred to as men of dress, judging from the records left by them. In 1831, the law provided that the stocks of Indiana militia men had to be made of black leather or silk. Among articles stolen from Andrew Porter, owner of a boat in 1821, two miles below the mouth of Deer creek in Perry county, were "a close-bodied black broadcloth coat with a black velvet collar, a gold watch (cased as a hunting watch) and a yellow silk handkerchief"—fairly good evidence of some style. "Silk Shirt," a warrior of the Delaware tribe of Indians lost several horses at an Indian encampment near Vincennes, in 1820. He advertised for their recovery in the *Western Sun*, June 24, 1820. If his mother followed the traditional method in naming him, some settlers must have been wearing silk shirts at least a generation before Mr. Proffit put in his appearance in southern Indiana. Even in those days a voter could do what a candidate or a public official could hardly afford to do.

In the decade of the thirties men were far more particular about their personal appearance than they are at present. In an advertisement at Vincennes, in 1836, are these items:

Silk velvet, marseilles, and valencia vestings; Italian silk cravats; silk and linen handkerchiefs; gentlemen's silk, linen, cotton, horseskin and beaver gloves; silk half-hose, silk and satin vests, silk hats, etc.

In 1840, a well dressed gentleman wore blue broadcloth with plated gold buttons, a buff vest, and a high hat.

Mr. Proffit was never at a loss in the social duties of his day. By his friends he was considered one of the finest gentlemen in Indiana, while those not his friends, or not in sym-

pathy with his political ideas, were inclined to say he was "high-falutin"—a pioneer expression for well-mannered or perhaps aristocratic people. Well may we take our hats off to the ghost of any pioneer politician who escaped severe criticism. In the decade of the thirties Governor Noah Noble was a very polished man. In the decade of the forties, James Whitcomb, a Democratic nominee and a very polished man, became governor; so we see Mr. Proffit was in his class with good manners. In retrospect, we look in the mirror of history and biography, with pardonable pride and pleasure upon this pioneer orator of the Pocket and perhaps wonder why he came to southern Indiana. In his day thousands of flat boats, loaded with the products of the Wabash valley, reached New Orleans annually. Perhaps he came north to make his mark, or his fortune, for the same reason that hundreds of young Hoosiers went west fifty years ago. It would seem that of Mr. Proffit no citizen of Pike county could think without pleasure or speak without praise. If there are to be any paintings on the walls of the new temple of justice in that county paintings of Mr. Proffit, Mr. Foster, The Old Fort, The Buffalo Trail, and Abraham Lincoln moving to Illinois, should find appropriate places. It would help local history throughout all of southern Indiana. If I were a citizen of Pike county I would ask permission to suggest this to the county commissioners. The records of Pike county show that Mr. Proffit was awarded the contract for the construction of the first brick court house in the county, in the year 1834. This would indicate that he was a man of means or good credit, when he was yet very young. Mr. Simon Morgan, a grandson of Mr. Proffit, has an oil painting of Mr. Proffit. Not many pioneers of Mr. Proffit's day were financially able to sit for an oil painting though ever so crude.

Along the vista of a century of local history there are high points and bright lights. Mr. Proffit was a bright light in the wilderness of southern Indiana. He was qualified by inherited aptitude, training, and education to be an orator, and a leader of men. In 1836, General Harrison received 165 votes in Dubois county. Van Buren received 127. In 1840, General Harrison also carried Dubois county; he received 264 votes to Van Buren's 239, and since then only the Demo-



cratic candidates for president carried the county. In Pike county, Harrison received 474 votes to Van Buren's 318. To Mr. Proffit's efforts are due many of these Whig votes.

As has been previously stated, Mr. Proffit died in Louisville, Kentucky. The *Louisville Democrat*, of September 8, 1847, in speaking of Mr. Proffit's death said:

The Hon. George H. Proffit, who has filled several important stations in our country, died at the Comstock House about one o'clock, on the night of the 6th. inst. He has been afflicted for some time, we learn, and came to our city last Thursday for the purpose of procuring further medical aid. This will be sad news for his family, as it did not look for his death so soon.

This notice was copied by the *Indiana State Sentinel*, *Madison Courier*, and the *Western Sun*, and that seems to have been the extent of the notices. At that time all these papers were using column after column in explaining how Judge Embree came to defeat Robert Dale Owen for congress, by 391 votes, in Mr. Proffit's old district. The remains of Mr. Proffit lie buried in the Walnut Hills cemetery, at Petersburg. The inscription on the stone reads as follows:

HON. GEORGE H. PROFFIT

Born in the

City of New Orleans, La., September 7th, 1807

Died in the

City of Louisville, Ky., September 7th, 1847

Aged 40 years.

He was frequently elected to the Legislature from the Counties of Pike and Dubois, was elected to Congress from the First Congressional District in 1839 and re-elected in 1841; was appointed Minister from the United States to the Empire of Brazil in 1842. In all the various positions of Honor and Trust which he filled he acquitted himself with credit and honor and to the entire satisfaction of his constituency and the government which employed him.

The records of Pike county reveal, in the petition of the widow for the setting aside to her of her dower interest, that Mr. Proffit died the owner of 1,541 acres of land, practically all of which was in the immediate vicinity of Petersburg, some of which the town now covers. In addition to this he owned seven lots in the town and two very valuable lots in the city of Evansville. His personal estate was undoubtedly very large

for that day, since the settlement of other estates show payments of interest, debts, etc., to Mr. Proffit. Mr. Proffit left as his only heirs his wife and Emily; the latter married Goodlet Morgan a few months after her father's death and the estate was settled out of court; that is, the personal estate was so disposed of. Mrs. Proffit shared in Mr. Proffit's estate under Indiana's first constitution when a widow's estate was not under the more liberal laws that appeared later through the efforts of Robert Dale Owen in behalf of the women of Indiana.

At the time of his death Mr. Proffit was one of the wealthiest men in this section of Indiana. This was accumulated in the few years he was in Pike county. He owned good property in the city of Evansville. The property he owned at the time of his death would now be worth a handsome fortune. Most of this was made in mercantile business and in trading in land, although he did not hesitate to "take a chance." As an evidence of this it is well known that he wagered \$5,000 on Polk's election and won the money. It was not regarded as any "surething" either, owing to the great popularity of Clay. Mr. Proffit would also bet on a horse race, or back his judgment on a dog or cock fight. This sporting inclination was one of the secrets of his great popularity with the pioneers. He drank, as did most men of his day, but rarely to excess. Notwithstanding the fact that he mixed freely with the people, took part in their sports, and occasionally drank with them, he seems to have had a manner that let them know that while he could do these things, he was, after all, not really one of them. They had this feeling and seemed to have respected him for it. He was, after all, a southerner, with the southern man's class ideas.

While there seems to be no record that Mr. Proffit was educated especially for the law, he practiced that profession to a limited extent in Petersburg, and was unquestionably far above the average lawyer of that day in ability and learning. However, the profession at that time did not offer great prospects of financial return. The litigation was mostly trivial and small sums only were involved. Goodlet Morgan, who married Miss Proffit, told the following story about one of Mr. Proffit's experiences as a lawyer:

Mr. Proffit was engaged to prosecute a small civil suit before a local justice of the peace. The justice was a man of decided views on all subjects and one who made up his mind quickly. The evidence being in, Mr. Proffit arose to make an argument for his client. The justice promptly told him that it was useless to argue the case, that the court's mind was made up and that he was going to decide the case against Mr. Proffit's client. Mr. Proffit insisted on his right to be heard until the court finally said: "Mr. Proffit, the court has no objection to hearing you make a speech, but it is now supper time, the evidence is in, and the court here and now decides the case in favor of the defendant and against your client; the court will be here at eight o'clock in the morning and so far as I am concerned you may speak until sun-down and I will hear you. Court is adjourned." Mr. Proffit, who was a man of violent temper, when aroused, was making loud protests long after the justice had closed his office and gone home to supper, but gradually the ludicrous side of the matter dawned upon Mr. Proffit and he later enjoyed telling the story as much as his hearers enjoyed listening to it.

Mrs. Mary J. Taylor, of Petersburg, who was fifteen years old at the time of Mr. Proffit's death, was one of the play-mates of his two daughters. She was in the Proffit home countless times. She says that when in good health Mr. Proffit weighed about one hundred ten pounds. He was a charming man about home, of perfect manners and idolized his family. He was gone much of the time and on the occasion of his return his wife and daughters always gave a "party" to celebrate the event to which the young folks, and especially the friends of the girls, were invited. On these occasions Mr. Proffit was always at his best, kept the girls in a high state of delight with tales of his experiences as member of the legislature, member of congress, and minister to Brazil. His house was well furnished for that day. The entertainments given were always a source of pleasure to the young. Mr. Proffit took special pains to entertain the girl friends of his daughters, and soon made them feel perfectly at ease in his presence. Mrs. Taylor remembers him thus as one of the most charming men she ever saw. Mrs. Taylor also remembers his wife. She was Miss Mahala Wyatt, daughter of John Turner Wyatt, a prosperous farmer of near Petersburg, and was reputed to be the most beautiful girl of her day in this section of the country. Her father lived on the road from Petersburg to Evansville, and it was on one of his trips to Evansville that Mr. Proffit first saw her. She retained her beauty almost to

the day of her death, which occurred long after that of her distinguished husband. She had none of the education that distinguished Mr. Proffit; yet for her he always manifested the strongest affection. One of Mrs. Taylor's most vivid recollections of him is his devotion to his wife and daughters. The daughters also had much of their mother's beauty.

Unfortunately Mrs. Taylor remembers little of the political life of that day. She never attended a political meeting at which Mr. Proffit spoke, and says that girls of her age, as a rule, did not attend political meetings in those days. She does not remember exactly the way Mr. Proffit was brought home after his death at Louisville, but thinks it was overland on the old Buffalo trail to New Albany. She distinctly remembers his death and says that the death of Abraham Lincoln was the only other occurrence of the kind that ever caused so much excitement in Petersburg and vicinity. It seems that it was wholly unlooked for and unexpected by the majority of people and even by his family. She naively remarks that Mr. Proffit was regarded here as being almost as great as a president.

Mr. and Mrs. Proffit were the parents of two daughters, Emily, who became the wife of the Hon. Goodlet Morgan, and Amanda, who died at the age of nine years and six months. All the members of the family are buried at Walnut Hills cemetery at Petersburg. An inscription on a stone reads:

Amanda, second daughter of George H. and Mahala Proffit. Died September 18, 1845, aged 9 years, 6 months, and 3 days.

On February 1, 1848, an act of the General Assembly was approved which named Mahala Proffit as administratrix of the estate and also as guardian of Emily Proffit.

Some years after the death of Mr. Proffit his widow became the wife of John B. Hannah, a man well known locally, and very prominent in the Democratic party of Pike county.

We may not have measured this man correctly, or have visualized him properly. We have tried to make national facts shine through the surface annals of local history and through the data of biography; and, to show the reasons for any action or position Mr. Proffit took. Perhaps there are no hues so soft and delicate as those with which the imagination invests that which is unseen or only faintly seen, particularly so,

when one takes no delight in being an iconoclast. Remote-ness in time may have an idealizing effect. The voice that comes from the dim chambers of the past may have a subdued, softening influence, for it is a good practice to write the shortcomings of men of the past upon the sands of the sea shore, if they must be written at all, and let the waves wash them away. It seems almost as difficult to say anything new of the old days as it is to say anything old of the new days. If you doubt this, try it.

In conclusion, we may as well recognize, that democracy places a heavier burden on individuals than do many other forms of government; for that reason every citizen of our form of government should know his local, state, and national history; for, after all, history, like charity, should begin at home. Biography is history with a soul. He who knows his history well, does not find much trouble in judging where America should have stood in the World War, or where she should stand now. It is unsafe for a state to produce ignorant men and indifferent women. None should be ignorant of, or indifferent to, the high aims and ambitions of America.

Let us rake "embers out of the ashes of the past," and fan them into a blaze to illuminate the present and throw a headlight into the future. There are many embers of unsullied fame in southern Indiana. Shall they shine? There were many good men during the mid-years of the nineteenth century whose biographies we should compile for the help they may be to the future historian. Old documents and papers taken from the blurred and scattered records of a countryside, are often rich in a subdued splendor of historical data and human interest.

The power of this nation was made up, in part, by the generations of the past, whose bodily forms long ago crumbled into dust beneath the bramble and the briar of neglected burial grounds; but whose sentiments, spirits, and impulses move on. Woodrow Wilson says:

The history of a nation is only the history of its villages written large. Local history is the ultimate substance of national history.

Poets, painters, and peers have pictured the passing pioneers in pleasing poetry and polite prose; why can not we

ordinary mortals try it? History mellows with age, and historians themselves soften in their interpretations of men and of conduct. Some pioneers were leaders, great local historical figures, whom their grandchildren may well study, analyze, and admire. May the time soon come when the names of our pioneers will shine with the reward that justly belongs to them; however, the illumination of the past will not serve its best purpose unless its rays are able to penetrate into the present and to bestow guidance and confidence for the future. Often a generation will place an erroneous judgment upon contemporaneous men and events, and time only will correct the injustice.

Mr. Proffit's life was all too short, being only forty years to a day. He died too young, but most men die at the wrong time. His political career is a wonderful record of brilliant achievements, successes, and, in time, adversities. In fewer than twenty years he advanced from bartering indigo for mink skins at Petersburg and Portersville on the banks of White river, to being sent as envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary by the president of the greatest republic on earth, and being received by the emperor of the greatest American empire at Rio de Janeiro, on the shores of the sea. It recalls to mind the lines of the poet:

Honor and fame from no condition rise,  
Act well your part, there all the honor lies.

It may be said of Mr. Proffit, and of each of the other Hoosier pioneers mentioned in this sketch:

What lasting gratitude to them we owe!  
'Tis from their toils our richest blessings flow,  
Illustrious men! though slumbering in the dust,  
You still are honored by the good and just!  
Posterity will shed a conscious tear,  
And, pointing, say, 'There sleeps a pioneer.'

We have accomplished our purpose if we have, for a short time brought back the pioneers to the very few yet living who knew them and have given some slight basis for appreciation by those who knew them not.

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